

Our bilateral partnership dates back to the Cold War when Turkey served as an important bulwark against the creeping influence of the Soviet Union. Time has not diminished Turkey's geostrategic importance. Today Ankara finds itself at the intersection of several critical challenges: the instability in Syria and Iraq, the threat of ISIS and other extremist groups, and the refugee crisis spawned by this regional upheaval.

The United States relies on Turkey and other regional partners to help coordinate and strengthen our collective response. I was deeply troubled when renegade military units attempted to overthrow Turkey's democratically elected government last July. Turkey's strength is rooted in the democratic legitimacy of its government—a pillar of stability targeted by the reckless and criminal coup attempt.

As chairman of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, or U.S. Helsinki Commission, I take very seriously the political commitments made by the 57 participating states of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, OSCE. These commitments, held by both the United States and Turkey, represent the foundation of security and cooperation in the OSCE region. They include an indispensable focus on human rights, rule of law, and democratic institutions.

In the OSCE's founding document, the Helsinki Final Act, participating states affirm "the universal significance of human rights and fundamental freedoms" and consider respect for these to be an "essential factor" for international peace and security. This vision is consistent with long-established U.S. foreign policy promoting human rights and democracy as cornerstones of a safer, more stable international order.

With these principles in mind, the United States must pay urgent attention to the current situation in Turkey and the danger it poses to Turkish and regional stability. Eroding respect for fundamental freedoms, rule of law, and democratic institutions in Turkey has proceeded at an alarming pace. The government's planned "executive presidency" will further decrease government accountability.

Since the attempted coup more than 9 months ago, Turkey has operated under a state of emergency that gives the government sweeping authority to curtail rights and silence opponents. Certain extraordinary measures may have been justified in the immediate aftermath to restore order, investigate events, and bring perpetrators to justice, but the government's actions have stretched far beyond these legitimate aims. The ongoing purge has touched every institution of government, sector of society, corner of the country, and shade of opposition—military or civilian, Turk or Kurd, religious or secular, nationalist or leftist, political or non-political.

An atmosphere of fear and uncertainty has settled over Turkish society

as more than 100,000 people have been detained or arrested. Tens of thousands have been fired from their jobs, had their professional licenses revoked, and had their names released on public lists without any recognizable due process. The government removed and replaced thousands of judges and prosecutors within hours of the coup's defeat, compromising the independence of the judiciary at a moment when an impartial justice system had become more important than ever.

The government has also closed more than 150 media outlets. Upwards of 80 journalists are behind bars. The offices of the country's oldest newspaper were raided, and the paper's editor-in-chief and other staff were arrested. The media environment was already under extraordinary pressure before the coup. Last spring, the government seized control of the country's highest circulation paper. Self-censorship is now widely practiced to avoid provoking the government's ire.

Additionally, state of emergency decrees have given regional governors the ability to curtail freedom of assembly rights, harming the ability of civil society organizations to organize rallies concerning the referendum. Since July, the government has detained more than a dozen opposition parliamentarians. Many more continue to face criminal charges for political statements they made before the coup attempt.

It is difficult to overstate the chilling effect these measures have had on political debate in Turkey; yet these are the circumstances under which Turks voted on April 16. These major constitutional changes passed with a slim majority of 51 percent. The OSCE's international observation mission stated in its preliminary conclusions that the vote "took place on an unlevel playing field" and that "fundamental freedoms essential to a genuinely democratic process were curtailed."

Under the revised constitution, the once largely ceremonial position of President will convert into an "executive presidency" and the position of Prime Minister will be abolished. The President will be elected along with the national assembly every 5 years and has the ability to dissolve the assembly and call new elections at will. The President will also appoint a larger proportion—nearly half—of the country's supreme judicial council. In a report on these new constitutional provisions, the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe concluded that the amendments are a "step backwards" and pose "dangers of degeneration . . . towards an authoritarian and personal regime."

Turkey is undergoing a disturbing transformation, and I am concerned these changes could undermine the strength of our partnership. President Erdogan's government has dramatically repressed dissent, purged opponents from every sector of government

and society, and is now poised to consolidate power further under his self-described "executive presidency."

In the short term, the Turkish Government should act swiftly and transparently to investigate credible claims of voting irregularities in the referendum, as well as the legality of a surprise electoral board decision to admit an unknown number of ballots that should be deemed invalid under existing rules. Public trust in the outcome of such a consequential vote is of utmost importance. Sadly, until now, the government has responded to these challenges with dismissiveness and suppression. In the past week, dozens of activists have been detained for participating in protests against the election results.

Furthermore, the government should lift the state of emergency, stop all forms of repression against the free press, release all imprisoned journalists and political activists, and urgently restore public confidence in the judiciary. Only then can it credibly and independently adjudicate the tens of thousands of cases caught up in the government's months-long dragnet operations.

A country where disagreements are suppressed rather than debated is less secure. A country where institutions are subordinated to personalities is less stable. A country where criticism is conflated with sedition is less democratic. Unless President Erdogan moves urgently to reverse these trends, I fear our partnership will inevitably become more transactional and less strategic. It will become more difficult to justify long-term investment in our relationship with Turkey if the future of the country becomes synonymous with the fortunes of one party or one individual.

The United States and Turkey need a solid foundation for enduring cooperation to tackle regional instability, terrorism, migration, and other challenges. The future of this partnership is difficult to imagine in the midst of a prolonged state of emergency, wide-scale purges, and weakened democratic institutions.

#### WASTE MANAGEMENT NATIONAL CAREER DAY

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, I would like to recognize Thursday, May 4, as Waste Management National Career Day and share with you the importance of hiring and promoting women in non-traditional female positions as drivers and technicians. I believe it is important that we support and encourage women to pursue these career opportunities that have been historically populated by men.

Women comprise only 2 percent of current drivers and technicians. Waste Management National Career Day will provide an opportunity to share stories of women who have held these positions successfully and moved up into management.

I support this initiative because I believe, as we continue to highlight economic opportunities for women, it is imperative that the private sector develop platforms where women can learn about careers they normally would not consider. This national career day is an excellent example of waste management being proactive in creating ways to increase the number of women in these types of careers across the country.

Without a doubt, investment in women in nontraditional careers brings about significant returns. Women contribute every day to our skillful, effective, and talented workforce. I commend waste management for building a platform where you can increase hiring of females as drivers, technician, front-line management, and give them opportunity for advancement.

#### REMEMBERING LIEUTENANT COLONEL LEO THORSNESS

Mr. MCCAIN. Mr. President, I come to the floor today deeply saddened by the passing of my dear friend and fellow POW, Lt. Col. Leo Thorsness. One of the greatest honors of my life was serving with Leo, a man whose service exemplified selfless duty and devotion to others. Leo earned the Medal of Honor for his heroism in a daring combat mission in North Vietnam in 1967 when he flew directly into hostile territory on dangerously low fuel in an attempt to rescue his comrades who had been downed in an attack. Just 2 weeks after that courageous mission, Leo's aircraft was shot down, and he was taken captive by North Vietnamese soldiers. Leo would spend the next 6 years imprisoned, including a full year in solitary confinement, and endure unspeakable pain and suffering because of his steadfast adherence to our code of conduct. However, Leo never let this experience break his spirit and inspired the rest of us with his patriotism, perseverance, and hope that we would someday be free.

After returning home, Leo continued to live a selfless life of service, as a volunteer, State senator, and public speaker, with a simple message: "Do what's right—help others." I am forever grateful for Leo's generosity, friendship, and example and, along with Cindy, send my heartfelt condolences to Leo's wife, Gaylee, and their entire family as we bid farewell to a genuine American hero.

#### TRIBUTE TO NANCY IACOMINI

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, I would like to take this opportunity to talk about a special member of the Senate family, Nancy Iacomini. Nancy, who has served as the Democratic Secretary's administrative assistant since 1998, is retiring after 34 years of devoted public service. I know I speak on behalf of all of my colleagues when I say I am going to miss Nancy, but she has certainly earned a respite, and I

want to wish her all the best in her retirement.

Nancy is a proud Pittsburgh native. She earned her bachelor of arts degree in art history from the University of Notre Dame. She was an excellent student: she was on the dean's honor list, she was a Notre Dame scholar, and she graduated cum laude. Then she earned a master of arts degree in art history with a concentration in museum practice from George Washington University. Armed with her degrees and proven academic success, Nancy went to work for the National Gallery of Art, NGA. She spent 5 years at the NGA, holding positions of increasing responsibility. During this time, she also contributed entries and artist biographies to "La Vie Moderne: Nineteenth Century Paintings from the Permanent Collection of the Corcoran Gallery of Art," Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 1983.

In 1988, Nancy decided to shift her focus from art history to the art of the possible, and she joined the Democratic Policy Committee as a staff assistant. Within a few short months, she was promoted to the position of special assistant to the floor staff and then again a short time later to the position of executive assistant. The art world pulled her back, though, and from 1994 to 1998, she served as deputy congressional liaison at the National Endowment for the Arts, NEA. Some may recall that this was a critical time in the NEA's history when its very existence was at stake. Nancy helped the NEA weather the storm and then returned to the Senate to work in the Democratic Secretary's office.

Since Nancy came to work in Washington, she has lived in Virginia. Nancy has held leadership roles in the Ballston/Virginia Square Civic Association, the Cherrydale Citizens Association, and the Neighborhood Conservation Advisory Committee. She is a past member and chairman of the county's transportation commission, a past member and chairman of the historical affairs and landmark review board, and past chairman of the towing advisory board. She also chaired the fire station No. 3 relocation task force. Nancy has also participated in the East Falls Church Working Group, the Clarendon Sector Plan Update, neighborhood traffic calming measures ad hoc advisory group, the subdivision ordinance working group, and the joint George Mason University/Arlington County advisory board. She served as Arlington's representative to WMATA's Riders' Advisory Council from 2006 to 2009 and chaired the council in 2008.

Here in the Senate, Nancy has had so many responsibilities that it would be hard to list them all, but I would note a few. Every Tuesday when the Senate is in session, there is a conference lunch. Nancy has been responsible for organizing the lunch, the topics for discussion, and the materials to be distributed. Despite much complaining from Senators whom I shall not name,

she singlehandedly made the lunches more nutritious, with healthier entrees and more salads. That is no small accomplishment. My staff and I worked with Nancy and Gary Myrick on updating and revising the conference rules. Nancy's institutional memory and patience and helpful suggestions were crucially important and much appreciated in that endeavor. She helped people find jobs. She answered every imaginable inquiry from Senators and staff. I could go on, but suffice it to say that Nancy Iacomini has kept the "Democratic trains" running on time here in the Senate. She has done so with diligence and grace and good humor and skill. Will Rogers famously said, "I am not a member of any organized political party; I am a Democrat." Well, he didn't know Nancy. Of course, if he did, he would have liked her—just as we all do.

We are going to miss Nancy's quiet competence and her sense of humor. We are going to miss the pumpkin outfits she would put on for Halloween. We are going to miss her wonder dog Flash. I hope Nancy will come back to visit us every now and then and even bring Flash with her, but I know she is looking forward to spending more time with her husband, Dan, and the rest of her family, pursuing her myriad hobbies, interests, and community activities and rooting for the Notre Dame football team.

Nancy Iacomini has devoted 34 years of her life to government service. We are all better off because of that service. As the fictional Inspector Morse reminds us, "To make an end is to make a beginning." I would ask all of my colleagues to join me in thanking Nancy and wishing her all the best as she begins the next chapter in her life.

#### ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

##### TRIBUTE TO J.P. AND TIARA THOMAS

• Mr. DAINES. Mr. President, this week, I have the distinct honor of recognizing the Thomas family for giving their time and talent to serve as foster parents for children in Lake County. J.P. Thomas and his wife, Tiara Thomas, have done honorable work by providing structure and consistency in many young lives.

J.P. and Tiara began serving as foster parents in their early twenties. The young couple took a short break from fostering as their own family began to grow, but soon returned to serving as foster parents in order to help their community. They have provided a positive environment for 15 Montana children in their home on the Flathead Indian Reservation. Throughout the challenging journey of serving as foster parents, J.P. and Tiara give credit to the Cornerstone Faith Center in St. Ignatius for helping them find the balance to meet the demands of faith, family, fostering, youth sports, and work.